

Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 R

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-----058303 311846Z /46

R 310204Z MAR 78

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 082747

EXDIS, FOR CHARGE FROM HOLBROOKE

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS:MILI, PDIP, SHUM, CASC, LA, US

SUBJECT:AMERICAN MIA'S IN LAOS

REF: 1. STATE 66207; 2. VIENTIANE 350 AND PREVIOUS

, AS YOU KNOW, IT IS AND HAS BEEN THE AMERICAN POSITION
THAT WE ACCEPT NO OBLIGATION TO PROVIDE AID OR "REPARA-
TIONS" TO VIETNAM, LAOS OR CAMBODIA. WE HAVE MADE IT CLEAR
TO BOTH THE VIETNAMESE AND THE LAO THAT WE WILL NOT PROVIDE
AID AS A PRECONDITION TO ESTABLISHMENT OR CONTINUANCE OF
RELATIONS. WE HAVE ALSO REPEATEDLY EXPLAINED TO LAO AND
VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES THAT WE CANNOT ACCEPT A "LINKAGE"
OF THE AID ISSUE WITH THE ISSUE OF THEIR PROVIDING AN
ACCOUNTING FOR OUR MISSING IN ACTION. THE UNITED STATES
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VIEWS THE MIA ISSUE AS A SEPARATE AND HUMANITARIAN ONE
WHICH CANNOT BE USED TO BARTER FOR POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC
ADVANTAGE.

2. NEVERTHELESS, IT IS OBVIOUS FROM OUR CONSULTATIONS IN
CONGRESS ON THE SUBJECT OF POSSIBLE FOOD ASSISTANCE FOR
LAOS THAT PROGRESS ON MIA MATTERS WOULD BE OF ASSISTANCE

IN IMPROVING ATTITUDES IN THE AMERICAN CONGRESS AND WITH THE AMERICAN PUBLIC TOWARD THE LAO APPEAL FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE. EVEN CONGRESSMEN WHO ARE GENERALLY SYMPATHETIC

TO THE HUMANITARIAN CASE FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE TO LAOS IN THEIR CURRENT EMERGENCY POINT TO THE LACK OF ANY PROGRESS IN RESOLVING THE MIA ISSUE AS A MAJOR PROBLEM FOR THEM. THIS WAS REFLECTED IN RECENT HIRC EAST ASIAN (WOLFF) SUBCOMMITTEE HEARINGS (REF 1). THAT SUBCOMMITTEE PLANS TO INCORPORATE STATEMENT ON FOOD AID IN ITS REPORT TO HIRC AND WILL ALLUDE TO IMPORTANCE OF PROGRESS IN GETTING MIA INFORMATION. THE SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT IS DUE OUT IN MAY 1978.

3. WE ASSUME SMALL LAO EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON DOES LITTLE REPORTING ON CONGRESSIONAL ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES. WE BELIEVE LAO SHOULD UNDERSTAND PRESENT AMERICAN DOMESTIC CLIMATE AND SHOULD KNOW THAT PROVIDING ANY MIA INFORMATION THEY HAVE NOW WOULD BE BEST WAY TO CONVINCE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND CONGRESS OF THEIR GOOD WILL AND TO INCREASE SUPPORT IN CONGRESS, AND AMONG AMERICAN PUBLIC, FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE.

4. WE DO NOT REPEAT NOT PROPOSE THAT THE EMBASSY MAKE A FORMAL DEMARCHE TO THE LAO ON THIS ISSUE. WE WOULD, HOWEVER, LIKE TO HAVE YOUR VIEWS ON THE DESIRABILITY OF RAISING THE MATTER INFORMALLY AND IN LOWEST POSSIBLE KEY, PER-CONFIDENTIAL

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HAPS DURING A SOCIAL OCCASION, WITH AN APPROPRIATE LAO OFFICIAL, (FOR EXAMPLE, NOUPHAN OR SOUBANH OR OTHER RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL). YOU WOULD MAKE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

--THERE IS SERIOUS DOMESTIC AMERICAN CONCERN THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED NO INFORMATION ON ANY OF OUR MISSING FROM THE LAO GOVERNMENT SINCE 1975. EVEN MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WHO ARE SYMPATHETIC TO PROPOSALS FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE SEE THE LACK OF PROGRESS IN RESOLVING THE MIA ISSUE AS A MAJOR PROBLEM.

--THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC HAVE AND WILL CONTINUE TO REJECT ANY SUGGESTION THAT WE SHOULD "PAY" IN AID OR OTHERWISE FOR INFORMATION ON OUR MISSING. THERE IS THEREFORE NOTHING TO BE GAINED BY WITHHOLDING ANY INFORMATION THE LAO MAY OBTAIN OR BY PROLONGING THE PROCESS OF CASUALTY RESOLUTION.

--ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE IS NO BETTER WAY TO CONVINCE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND CONGRESS OF THE LAO GOVERNMENT'S GOOD WILL AND TO IMPROVE THE OVERALL CLIMATE IN OUR RELATIONS FROM THE AMERICAN POINT OF VIEW AND THE ATTITUDE IN THE

UNITED STATES TOWARD AMERICAN HELP TO THE LAO PEOPLE THAN
BY MAKING A SINCERE EFFORT TO RESOLVE THE MIA ISSUE.

--WE UNDERSTAND INFORMATION MAY BE PARTIAL AND INCONCLU-
SIVE ON MANY OF OUR MISSING, BUT EVEN PIECES OF INFORMATION
WHICH HELP AMERICAN FAMILIES TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO
THEIR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS WOULD BE USEFUL. IF ANY INFOR-
MATION IS AVAILABLE, NOW IS THE TIME TO DIVULGE IT.

5. PLEASE LET ME HAVE YOUR REACTION TO AN INFORMAL AP-
PROACH ALONG THESE LINES. THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION IS: CAN
IT BE DONE WITHOUT ESTABLISHING FORMAL LINKAGE OR UNDULY
RAISING EXPECTATIONS?

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MIA, POLICIES, ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE082747
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: JRJOHNSON/FMLC
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780140-0659
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978032/aaaaabsi.tel
Line Count: 136
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 295581bc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 78 STATE 66207, 78 VIENTIANE 350
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3188717
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AMERICAN MIA'S IN LAOS
TAGS: MILI, PDIP, SHUM, CASC, LA, US
To: VIENTIANE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/295581bc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014